

Muntassir Mamoon*
Rao Farman Ali and 1971

[Editorial: The University Press Limited published *Sei Sob Pakistani* [*Those are the Pakistanis* – literally translating] in 1999. Although written in the style of a travelogue, it is not a mere travelogue in the conventional sense. This trip aimed to explore the attitudes of Pakistani politicians, military officials, and civilians towards the events and significance of 1971. The Liberation War of 1971 was not only a glorious victory, but the people of this region had to endure one of the most brutal genocides of the last century. Pakistan's state apparatus perpetrated the genocide that resulted in exterminating more than 3 million people and displacing almost 10 million people. One of the most ignored aspects that the book dealt with was exploring the attitudes of the perpetrators, allegedly responsible persons, and the politicians of Pakistan towards the genocidal event. After its publication, the book became a milestone for instigating a different genre of narrative history. After almost 25 years, we have initiated the translation of the text. The following is an excerpt from *Sei Sab Pakistani* (1999) currently under translation. The present excerpt features the interview of General Rao Farman Ali who was in charge of civil administration in East Pakistan during the tumultuous year of 1971. He remains one of the prime accused for his alleged role in the abduction and massacre

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of Bangali intellectuals in Dhaka on the night of 15 - 16 December. This killing of pro-liberation intellectuals through hand-picked death-squads, consisting of Al-Shams and Al-Badar members, in the dying hours of the 1971 liberation war remains one of the blackest chapters in the history of human genocide. Along with General Niazi, he was among the first lot of POW's to be airlifted to India. After his repatriation back to Pakistan in 1974, he went on to serve as minister and as National Security Advisor in President Zia-ul-Haq's administration. He even wrote a book, *How Pakistan Got Divided* (1992), detailing his perspective of his involvement in the affairs of 1971. He died in 2004. The excerpted interview, therefore, serves as a valuable historical record and is still the only direct verbal testimony given by Farman Ali to any Bangladeshi.]

We were on our way to see the Margala Hills. Mohiuddin bhai asked the car to stop. In sight was a shopping complex. Nothing remarkable. Compared to Islamabad – the city – its shopping complexes were rather shabby. We needed camera rolls. After buying them, Mohiuddin bhai asked permission to make a call. He said that he wanted to try calling Khar. An exchange in Urdu happened briefly over the phone. We learned that Khar was staying in Hotel Intercontinental. Mohiuddin bhai said, 'We must get Khar. Let's go to Intercontinental.'

Yes, Intercontinental's pomp was in keeping with Islamabad. One felt it to be a different Pakistan on setting foot inside. Mohiuddin bhai gave the bell after learning Khan's room number from the hotel reception. He asked for Khar. In our country, the theme song of PA's of the big

bosses was 'Need to check.' Likewise, from Khar's room came the inquiry wanting to know about us callers and soon after followed – 'Need to check'. We were told that Khar was not available. But, that he would return shortly. Mohiuddin bhai said, 'Let's sit in the lobby.'

Therefore, we kept waiting for Mustafa Khar at the lobby. Handsomely dressed men and women walked all around us. The image which newspapers and periodicals carried of Pakistan bore no likelihood to the men and women seen in the lobby. A sentry was seated with a Kalashnikov in corner. I asked Mohiuddin bhai, 'Do you know Mustafa Khar?'

'No, not exactly.'

'Remember his appearance?'

'Somewhat foggily.'

'So, if Mustafa Khar at all enters through this lobby, you will identify him?'

'I might.'

'Mustafa Khar is trying to avoid us Mohiuddin bhai,' I said, 'This is a futile wait.'

'Still, let's see.'

Mohiuddin bhai sat unmoved at the lobby's sofa. I made a round of the entire lobby as I watched the flag-bearers of Pakistan's modern and rich society. Then, sitting by the roadside I regarded the Margala Hills. Passing the time was tedious. Returning after an hour or so I said, 'We must get going now. We have our appointment with Rao Farman Ali in the evening. That is far more important than all these Khar and stuff. It's now half past one in the afternoon.'

This time around Mohiuddin bhai appeared convinced. He dialled Mustafa Khar's room again. Khar wasn't back. I said, 'Khar will not be returning today anymore. He is a thorough politician. He has no intention to talk to us.'

We were returning by the Fazlul Haque Avenue. Islamabad had three roads after the names of A.K. Fazlul Haque, Khwaja Nazimuddin, and Suhrawardy. While on the move, I was thinking about our most important interview of the Pakistan tour later in the day. Two names were chiefly associated with the 1971 genocide in Bangladesh. General Niazi and General Rao Farman Ali. We had not been able to meet Niazi yet. But Farman had agreed to talk to us. Had even consented for the entire interview to be videoed. The interview was a first of its kind in twenty-five years. Farman Ali lived in Rawalpindi.

After the afternoon lunch, lying down, I flipped through Rao Farman Ali's autobiography. It was published in English with the title *How Pakistan Got Divided*. I had it translated by a former student of our Department, Shah Ahmad Reza. Mohiuddin bhai published it from UPL. On reading the book, it occurred to me that of all the erstwhile military officers in East Pakistan, Rao Farman Ali was the most clever and cool-headed man. Even after the debacle of 1971, he was held in esteem in Pakistan, and, at one point, even took on the responsibilities of a Minister of State. On reading Farman Ali's autobiography, it would appear that he knew nothing about what happened in Bangladesh in 1971. He had nothing to do with any of the activities of the armed forces. He was responsible for civil administration—that he had good terms with Sheikh Sahib, and so forth. I had the feeling that he would not say

more than what he had set down in his book. But we still had a mind to try. We started for Rawalpindi in the evening with a videographer.

Rawalpindi evolved as an army cantonment. A small town. It didn't take more than half an hour to reach Rawalpindi if the car was driven fast along the extensive, broad roads of Islamabad. Man-made forests flanked both sides of the road. Tall, green grass covered the side-way. It had blooming white daisies. Thicket of yellow flowers in places. It was silent and still all around. Rawalpindi stood at the end of the sweeping roads. It looked dismal. Like Karachi or Lahore, much of the place was given to residential areas for army officers. Those that had been given to them at a token price for the service to the nation. Farman was an old-era officer. So, he had obtained plot at a customary place only. By the time we tracked down Khurshid Alam Road in the defense residential area, the daylight had waned.

Rao Farman Ali had a one-storied neat little house. At the front was a strip of green lawn. Beds of seasonal flowers were all around. The surroundings had been made bright their explosion of colors. The sentry went and informed of our arrival. Out came Rao Farman Ali.

To tell the truth, I was a little disappointed on seeing Rao Farman Ali. I had the impression of a stoutly built military officer with an unfeeling smile and cruel eyes. But before me stood a spare man, bent down with age. Like a retired school or college teacher. Weighed down by life.

Rao Farman Ali graciously welcomed us inside. He said that he was sick—suffering from age-related ailments. But we had come from afar, and so he wanted to talk to us. I

was regarding the drawing room. It was elegantly furnished. A Chinese scroll was hanging at one end. We told Farman Ali of our objective. He said he was familiar of the matter and had no objection in talking about it. I was watching Farman Ali. This man—it was said—was involved in the liquidation of our intellectuals. One of the planners of the genocide. I was sitting next to him. The retribution that I had professed against them all along and what was also my heart's desire—I sat silently suppressing them. I couldn't tell what Farman was thinking. He was talking softly. The voice and the manner of speech did not resemble a soldier but that of a tired professor. After setting everything up, the videographer said, 'Ready.'

'General Rao Farman Ali,' asked Mohiuddin bhai, 'How did you get involved with the affair of Bangladesh?'

'I first went to East Pakistan in the year 1967. I came back once shortly before Yahya Khan assumed power. But since I had knowledge of the region, I was again sent back to East Pakistan. At the time, General Muzaffaruddin was the GOC and the Governor-in-charge. I worked as a civil affairs law administrator. But I want to clearly state that I had no involvement with the last phase of the military rule.'

'What does this mean?' Asked Mohiuddin bhai.

'It means,' replied Farman, 'There are many branches under military law. Civil affairs was my responsibility. I used to examine the files that came down to me from the Secretariat and pass them to the Governor for approval. Occasionally, I made inquiries. Literally, I had no power except this.'

'Which area of the national security did you look after?' Mohiuddin bhai asked again.

‘I actually looked after the political side. Let me give one example,’ spoke Farman, ‘Political parties were banned in Ayub Khan’s time. Students took the lead in these circumstances. I became busy with these students at this point.’

‘What was the manner of the engagement like?’ I asked.

‘The job was to bring the students to our side by winning over their minds. The same applied to the laborers as well. Actually, then, trouble brewed both across the student and the labor front. I kept working to resolve those.’

‘Whom do you think was responsible for this?’ Asked Mohiuddin bhai.

‘The problem was a complex one,’ said Farman, ‘And to this was added student politics. Students seized control of the Dhaka University. The police were barred from entering there. There happened to be a tall tree close by the University. We used to climb up the tree and inspect the situation five times a day. The students were on the loose.’

‘So, you were in quite an important post,’ I said. ‘Actually, your association with General Yahya might be the reason indeed for the post being conferred.’

Farman replied before I could finish my sentence, ‘No, I wasn’t close to Yahya in that sense. I never took alcohol in life. And, also I belonged to the junior cadre. Of course, I received quick promotions.’

‘Reason for this?’ Asked Mohiuddin bhai.

‘The reason is hard work,’ replied Farman, ‘While doing this job, I came across a thousand men. I knew every politician. Surely, afterwards, the situation changed...’

‘You had spoken about that in your book,’ I said.

‘No, really?’ Exclaimed Farman. ‘I had felt the East Pakistanis were demanding much more than they were entitled to.’

‘Are you talking about economic disparity?’ Asked Mohiuddin bhai.

‘No. I don’t understand economics,’ replied Farman. ‘As a brigadier, I had no knowledge of the true state of the economy.’

‘It makes you into a man from military culture,’ Mohiuddin bhai added, ‘You don’t care for the majority.’

‘Look, I at least realized that the East Pakistanis were a majority,’ replied Farman. ‘Surely, in the beginning, it didn’t occur to me. Later, in the course of encountering the situation, many of my perceptions underwent change. Once while inaugurating a bank branch at the cantonment I had said that the East Pakistanis were being influenced by the Hindus. I didn’t know that a Hindu leader was seated there. I was yet to understand then that they remain merged with the very society itself.’

‘The matter is a practical truth,’ I remarked. ‘It becomes obvious on merely reading any history book.’

‘I studied,’ replied Farman Ali like a scholar, ‘That Muslim peasants agitated against the British...had read in books.’

‘So far as I remember,’ I said, ‘In your book you wrote that history is a pre-determined matter. That in ‘69 you saw a poster depicting a dhoti-clad man, stick in hand.’

‘I am yet to come that far,’ said Farman. ‘At the time in East Pakistan, hatred was being propagated against West Pakistan.’

‘My question was,’ I said, ‘You saw a cane in the hands of a dhoti-clad man, but the majority in Bangladesh do not wear a dhoti. Why say majority, there is hardly any custom of dhoti at all! There is of *lungi*. The pre-meditation lay in this difference between dhoti and lungi. Wearing dhoti would mean the person is a Hindu. My point being, whether a prevalent practice or an old belief amongst you—Hindus were seen as influencing the Bangali Muslims. And a Hindu ought to be an Indian—right?’

‘You have said it correctly,’ Farman agreed vigorously.

‘But the matter is clear,’ added Mohiuddin bhai, ‘That the army was influenced by pre-existing ideas.’

‘No, not correct,’ said Farman. ‘We still believe that the Hindus swayed the mind and manner of the East Pakistanis.’

‘In your book you wrote,’ I said, ‘That Tajuddin Ahmed was the son of a Hindu family. That is, you heard something like that.’

‘No, not exactly that,’ replied Farman Ali. ‘Tajuddin was an anti-Pakistani. Mujib wasn’t. Khondaker, too, was not an anti-Pakistani.’

‘It means Tajuddin was a pro-Bangladeshi, a supporter of Bangalis?’ I asked.

‘No, the matter is slightly different. You could be a pro-Bangali. All Bangalis could be so. But what I want to say is that he wanted to break Pakistan.’

‘In ‘47, it were the Bengalis who brought about Pakistan. If the Hindus had influence there, why did the Bangalis want Pakistan?’ Mohiuddin bhai asked.

‘It was what I was trying to say,’ spoke Farman Ali. ‘What really happened that 95 out of 100 Muslims of East Bengal voted in favor Pakistan? It was East Pakistan which created Pakistan. It should have safeguarded Pakistan as well.’

‘Is that so?’

‘Isn’t it?’

‘Except when they voiced their rights, the situation changed that very instant,’ the tone made it appear that Mohiuddin bhai was getting cross.

‘Look, in this case, I am in favor of the Bangalis, that is, in favor of their just rights. But I am not in favor of dividing Pakistan.’

‘Don’t you think that the just rights of the Bangalis had been side-stepped by the use of this Pakistan sentiment?’ Mohiuddin bhai put forth.

‘The difference between the two things is,’ spoke Farman Ali, ‘That there is legitimacy for a region’s population to seek its rights but that need to happen within the framework of the state. I say that the East Pakistanis didn’t divide Pakistan, it were the West Pakistanis. But it is also a reality that both parties did make some mistakes. And the central government of the country committed certain blunders that were not in favor of preserving the unity of Pakistan.’

‘Understood,’ said Mohiuddin bhai. ‘The people of East Pakistan were entitled to speak against injustice. Awami League said it. The party’s representative Tajuddin said the same thing. Then, why only vilify him leaving everyone?’

‘You must know,’ Farman Ali stated in a manner to make us understand, ‘There were three types of men in the Muslim League, and the Awami League. Sheikh Mujib was the leader in Awami League. Khondaker Mostaq was the leader of the right-wing, and Abdus Samad the leader of the socialists. Tajuddin, too, belonged to the latter group. They all were in favor of East Pakistanis. But the difference is—while the Mujib and the Mostaq group made their demands within the framework of Pakistan, the likes of Tajuddin went beyond it.’

‘We get the drift of your perception,’ I said, ‘We take it that you will be able to tell us something about 25 March as well. You had written in your book that in the ‘70s elections you provided the Jamaat-e-Islami and other parties with funds.’

‘No, I didn’t provide funds. I helped them to win sittings.’

‘Reason?’

‘Look, this is no secret matter. I told this to Mujib too. If the right-wing people got a few seats, the pressure would have been less on Mujib. But he received an unimaginable referendum and became a hostage to the six-point resolution.’

‘Sheikh Mujib obtained the majority,’ said Mohiuddin bhai, ‘In that case, power should have been transferred into his hands— isn’t it?’

‘That should have been,’ replied Farman.

‘Then what happened?’ Asked Mohiuddin bhai.

‘I thought after the election compromise would be reached. But conflict came into view. Bhutto—Mujib—one didn’t believe the other.’

‘Do you know what was the Yahya - Bhutto agreement that took place in Larkana?’ Asked Mohiuddin bhai.

‘No, I don’t know anything about Larkana. General Umar told me the bare minimum,’ told Farman. ‘At Larkana, Bhutto told Yahya that it was he—Yahya—who had made Mujib the Prime Minister. Because Yahya had earlier stated that it was indeed Mujib who would be the premier. Yahya responded by saying that it was not him but the public who had made Mujib the Prime Minister. Bhutto asked for Mujib’s loyalty to be tested. And that process would entail postponing the meeting of the National Assembly. If Mujib protested, that would make him out as an anti-national. Bhutto was eager to be the Prime Minister himself. But it was one nation. He even spoke to a journalist about having two Prime Ministers. He denied it later, though. Bhutto took an aggressive role to save his party, and he surpassed all limits in doing that. He said—*idhar hum, udhar tum*—I belong here, you there. Has the matter become clear to you now?’

‘What you said cannot be taken to heart in its entirety,’ I remarked.

‘Bhutto and Mujib—both were in hostile attitudes,’ spoke Farman. ‘Winning by a huge vote, Sheikh Mujib became a captive to the six-point agenda. After the election, both of us had a discussion at the house of an employee of the Pakistan Tobacco Company. I wanted to know what was on his mind. The conversation was splendid. He didn’t want to break Pakistan.’

‘Your views are still not clear,’ said Mohiuddin bhai. ‘Are you trying to say that the authorities from the beginning wanted the talks to collapse?’

‘As far as I remember,’ replied Farman, ‘Yahya Khan came for the first meeting on 16 March. I was summoned by him, along with two officers from the Air Force. Masud, the hero of the ‘65 War, and General Shah Ali. We didn’t raise our voice during the meeting. Once Shah Ali tried to say something. He got snubbed. But I told the President that we should refrain from doing anything that would make East Pakistan to desert us.’

‘Then?’

‘The President spoke about Jinnah, the father of the Nation, who was willing to approve Suhrawardy’s proposal. And that it were us who turned it down. It showed the President to be willing to reach a resolution. I think he came to a settlement with Bhutto and Mujib. On 19 March, I rang up Mujib and asked whether there was any development—*bhai kuch huwa?* A friendly bond had developed between Mujib and me. He responded in the affirmative saying that some would become ministers from Punjab—there would be five from East Pakistan—and he would be the Prime Minister. But the next day Bhutto reached Dhaka and demolished everything.’

‘Then on 20 March one can say all roads to discussion were smothered?’ I asked.

‘You can say so,’ said Farman. ‘Bhutto was against the repeal of martial law. In November, the same Bhutto asked for transfer of power from Yahya under the martial law. Also, at the time, a lot of things were happening. Many in East Pakistan were saying if Singapore could remain independent, why could they not survive independently? The American ambassador in India had been saying that East Pakistan might as well have a durable existence

without West Pakistan. Emotions ran high. One of my familiar friends remarked that we must not allow the East Pakistani scoundrels to rule us. I said, if they are scoundrels, we, too, are scoundrels to them.'

'General,' said Mohiuddin bhai, 'We want to know something about 25 March. Why was the Operation Searchlight carried out?'

'Gradually, the situation became critical. We were hopeful until 19 March,' said Farman, 'But from 20th onwards, I felt something was amiss. Discussions were on at the President House. There were the President, General Pirzada, General Hamid, Admiral Ahsan, Colonel Ilyas and a few others. I and the GOC were not involved in these. Everything was being kept hidden from us. General Khadim Hussain Raja had been appointed the Commander then. I asked General Tikka to find out about the developments in the President House. Tikka came back and reported that probably the terms of the parley were not being agreed upon. The government needed to re-assert its authority. In the meantime, the army was virtually confined within the cantonment. Even food and vegetables were not being delivered to the cantonment. Foodstuffs were being airlifted from West Pakistan and everyone in East Pakistan thought, as if, soldiers were being brought over.'

'Oh!,' Mohiuddin bhai made an appearance to look surprised, 'Soldiers were not fetched from West Pakistan – so there were 90 thousand soldiers in East Pakistan from even earlier than 26 March. Or, did it increase gradually?'

'No, no,' said Farman, 'That is a different question. On 26 March, the first battalion of soldiers arrived from West Pakistan.'

‘What was the target of Operation Searchlight?’ Mohiuddin bhai asked again.

‘The tea is here. Let’s have it,’ said Farman, ‘And I am a bit tired as well.’

Yes, he was looking worn out. We poured our teas. The talk rolled along different topics. His elder daughter had been a wife to a military officer. She was now a widow. We conversed about General Niazi’s book and his character. Farman said that whatever he was saying about Niazi at the moment happened to be off the record. What he did say did not enhance Niazi’s image, but rather proved that the Pakistani army went on a rampage in Bangladesh committing rapes, murders, and arson. We resumed our discussion about an hour and a half later.’

‘Let’s go back to the original topic,’ said Mohiuddin bhai, ‘What was the target of Operation Searchlight?’

‘This kind of planning is made in view of a particular time,’ replied Farman, ‘That is, if a special situation arose at a special time, adopting what course would lead to success—that is what is chalked out. When the army is put into action, then, their objective is only to succeed. In East Pakistan, at the time, all forms of law had lost their relevance. This situation continued from 7 March to 25 March. We were in talks on 25 March. It was decided that only the politicians would be arrested. I gave the liaison officer Siddique Salik a letter on his way to the Governor House. In there I had stated that along with making room for capacity for effective intervention, a political solution must be recommended as well. The people whom we wanted to arrest must be provided with a political solution

immediately after their detention. Say, PPP's eight agendas were accepted. And Sheikh Mujib must not be assassinated. Though he must be arrested and kept separate from the radicals. I don't know whether the President gave any heed to these proposals at all.'

'Then?'

'Then I and General Khadim came back—isolated from the rest. We returned to our homes and let our wives know of the situation. I and Khadim were against military action. I told him that I was not worried about my own life, I was worried about Pakistan's existence. Because after this there would be no Pakistan. There was no way to resign as a military officer too. Sahibzada Yaqub had earned a lot disparagement for his resignation, though he was a brave soldier.'

'Let's assume,' said Mohiuddin bhai, 'That an order gets issued which amounts to senility, or is senseless. Are you bound to obey even then?'

'There is no precedent of disobeying orders in the army.'

'Nowadays, this kind of opinion is no longer being accepted at the war crime tribunals,' said Mohiuddin bhai.

'Might be,' Farman had a curt reply.

'As far as I remember,' I said, 'General Niazi had written that the kind of ruthlessness shown by Genghis Khan, or by Halaku Khan in Baghdad, must be emulated. He said that he wanted the land, not its people. Not only that, he mentioned that Rao Farman Ali did execute his orders word for word. It was written in your diary, too—verdant Bengal must be turned red.'

‘Two are different things,’ said Rao Farman Ali. ‘I am sorry but I have to say that General Niazi is a liar. The thing about making the green into red...I...’

‘That you have mentioned in your very book,’ I said.

‘You can ask Kazi Zafar that whether he gave a speech at Tungi on the matter,’ replied Farman. ‘And there were two more spokespersons. One from Jamaat, the other, Mohammad Toaha, a Marxist. Zafar wanted to convey through his address that he wished to transform East Pakistan’s Islamic thoughts into Marxist ideas—to make them into Marxist ensigns. On being informed by General Yaqub, I wrote it down in my diary. It was a single sentence. Could an entire plan be made based on a single sentence? General Niazi is now putting the blame on another’s shoulder. The book is full of lies. He even didn’t write the book himself. Tell him to write a single page of the book without looking it up. If he can, I will accept that the book was penned by him. Tikka never made comments like the ones you say. He was excellent as a Governor. However, it is unfortunate that he had been vilified uniformly in Baluchistan, and East Pakistan.’

‘You were saying something more about Niazi,’ I reminded him.

‘The day Niazi took charge,’ Farman began, ‘On the same day, he said he felt like he was inhabiting an enemy territory. But we never felt that we were in enemy territory. Rather, we believed we dwelled in Pakistan. He said many other dangerous things. Like, he would alter the racial profile of the people there.’

‘It is said that you raised the Rajakars?’ I asked.

'No, I think it was formed by the Martial Law Head Office,' replied Farman.

'Whose idea it was?' Asked Mohiuddin bhai.

'The force commander.'

'Who was he?'

'Niazi. It was he who created the Al-Shams and Al-Badar.'

'He dedicated the book to them as well,' I mentioned.

'He was their creator, manipulator, everything,' said Farman.

'Niazi had noted that the leaders of Al-Shams and Al-Badar were taken back as POW's?' Mohiuddin bhai inquired.

'I don't know,' replied Farman.

'It looks like you hardly know anything,' Mohiuddin bhai said half-mockingly.

'Look, in reality the command had collapsed at the time. I was no one then. Governor Malik resigned in the face of Indian attack. I had nothing left to do anymore.'

What ensued next was a quick exchange between Rao Farman Ali and me:

I asked, 'Was this incident from 13 December, the day before the killing of the intellectuals?'

'Yes. Niazi had blamed me for their killings...everyone blames me for the killings.'

'Why only them? The international media, too, held you responsible for this. Why?'

'I don't know. I was all by myself then... '

‘That you were one of the masterminds of the killing of the intellectuals, there are witness and proof that. And nobody has refuted them yet.’

‘I have never seen them in the international media.’

‘The liquidation of the intellectuals did start quite early. According to my knowledge, a doctor was murdered before the Notre Dame College in October. The killings got under way well in advance and reached their final culmination on 14 December. Also, while Niazi was busy with the battle front, you were in charge of the civil affairs.’

‘Niazi was the Martial Law Administrator.’

‘You were responsible for civil administration and politics. For example, you had regular contacts with Ghulam Azam and Abdul Mannan. They held regular meetings with you. They took your advice, and acted according to your instructions. So, at the time, nothing could have come to pass without your knowledge. Do you agree with this statement of mine?’

‘Why should I be in agreement?’

‘Because it were you...’

‘Does saying nothing convey murders?’

‘You were at the helms of administration.’

‘No, the situation changed after army rule was decreed. Within this rule, the Governor House had no special status. It only had control over the Secretariat, the police, and the Rajakars. The army, the EPCAF (the East Pakistan Civil Armed Force) were under the jurisdiction of the Martial Law Administrator and core commander. I had nothing under me.’

‘Then for everything General Niazi is responsible?’

‘General Niazi was responsible for maintaining law and order.’

‘But the sequence of events that I know...’

‘Listen,’ cutting me short Rao Farman Ali proceeded with a detailed description, ‘General Samsheer was in charge of Pilkhana. He asked me to meet him. He said we had to go and meet General Niazi. We usually didn’t see General Niazi for meetings. I agreed to go along. It was dusk by the time I reached Pilkhana. I saw a few parked vehicles. On being quizzed about their presence, Samsheer said that the vehicles were there for the special purpose for which we were visiting General Niazi. Then he said that a few people must be arrested. When I asked why, he told me to put the question directly to Niazi. When he asked about my opinion on the matter, I stated that it was not the time to arrest people rather to reckon the number of people that were with us.’

‘On which date was this incident?’

‘9 or 10 December. I don’t remember anything after that.’

‘Subsequent to the fall of Dhaka, a diary was found at the Governor House. In it was a list of the eliminated intellectuals.’

‘If I have to kill someone, will I preserve a list in this manner? Many came to me and made complaints against dozens of men. Say, someone had done this, or had been helping someone. I used to note down their names. It had nothing to do with those killings.’

‘So, it means that you have no knowledge about the killing of the intellectuals—no knowledge about the genocide in Bangladesh...’

Farman did not allow me to finish my sentence, 'Genocide? There was no genocide?'

'What do you mean when you say that there was no genocide?' I asked.

'That there was no genocide.'

'In every newspaper of the world it was written about the genocide.'

'No, that's not correct,

'Well, General,' I asked, 'What took place in Bosnia - Herzegovina, or is happening now – the reports being published in the newspapers – all that a lie?'

'They are not giving the correct news.'

'Let's say, there was no genocide. But people did get killed.'

'Yes, in the likelihood of such an event, some people would surely die.'

'Well, what could be the number of deaths? Ten, twenty, fifty thousand?' I uttered last number with emphasis.

'Yes, might be.'

I was only waiting for this answer. I spoke slowly, 'General, if the killing of fifty thousand men do not amount to genocide, then, what do you call a genocide?'

Rao Farman Ali got nothing more to answer.

• *Translation: Sagar Taranga Mandal*



Refugee 1971, Drawing: Farzana Islam Milky